

HISTORIC RESOURCE SURVEY AND LOCAL HISTORIC DISTRICTS

Michigan's *Local Historic District Act*, Public Act 169 of 1970, as amended (PA 169) requires that a historic district study committee conduct a photographic inventory of the historic resources in a proposed district. This inventory is called a historic resource survey. A survey is the systematic collection of data about a specified geographic area and consists of two parts:

- **Fieldwork** - site visits to the proposed district to take photographs of each resource. During the site visits, the surveyor records basic information about each resource including the architectural style, building materials, and any distinguishing architectural features. It is during this phase of the survey that the boundaries for the proposed historic district are determined.
- **Research** - use of primary and secondary sources to find out about the district's history and to place it in the broader historic context of the city, region, state or nation. Research requires visiting libraries, archives, historical societies, and city or county offices to utilize county histories, census data, building permits, city directories, fire insurance maps, and other sources to document the history of the district.

Historic resource surveys should be conducted according to the *Manual for Historic and Architectural Surveys in Michigan*, available free from the State Historic Preservation Office.

Purpose of the Survey

The purpose of the photographic inventory for a historic district study committee report is to create a pictorial record of what the resources in the district looked like at the time the district was established. The historic district commission will use this record when it reviews proposed projects for work in the district. SHPO staff will use the report to make environmental review decisions. It is important to think about how the survey data will be used when undertaking the work. Don't just take a photograph to fulfill the obligation. Be sure each photograph shows the resource clearly and that the viewer is able to discern the existing original material and significant features of individual resources.

Who Conducts the Survey

It is the responsibility of the historic district study committee to oversee the historic resource survey. Many study committees do the survey work themselves, others train volunteers to assist them. Sometimes, the local unit of government will have funding to hire a paid consultant to conduct the survey. All are acceptable methods. No matter who actually undertakes the work of the survey, it is the responsibility of the study committee to make sure the finished product is of good quality and meets the standards set forth in the *Manual for Historic and Architectural Surveys in Michigan*.

Type of Survey

To establish a local historic district, the historic district study committee must conduct an intensive level survey of the proposed district. An intensive level survey requires that a photograph be taken of each resource in the proposed district. It also requires that each historic property in the district be researched to determine who lived there or what businesses operated there and to connect significant people and events to the buildings themselves. Intensive level survey should provide enough information to evaluate the historic significance of the individual resources in the proposed district.

What Resources Are Surveyed

Since the historic district commission reviews work to both historic and non-historic resources in local historic districts, then all resources in the district must be photographed. In addition, significant secondary resources such as garages, carriage barns, smokehouses, etc. that will be reviewed by the commission should be photographed. Significant historic landscape features such as stone walls, fences, historic trees, fountains, etc. that will be reviewed by the commission should be photographed as well.

Photographic Documentation

A survey involves walking the proposed district with a clipboard and camera photographing all the resources within in it—both historic and non-historic—in as systematic a fashion as possible such as east to west or north to south. You may have to return to the site more than once to get, good clear photographs. Pay attention to the location of the sun and do not take a photograph if glare is washing out the building's detail—come back when the sun is at a different angle. It is helpful to have a map of the proposed district that includes lot lines and street addresses with you in the field so that you can mark what properties have been photographed should you need to return to the site.

Survey work should be done in the early spring or late fall when leaves are not on the trees to obscure buildings. Resources should not be unobstructed by trees, bushes, cars, or car mirrors. People should not appear in the photographs. The photograph should be taken from an oblique angle to capture the front and one side of the resource. The resource should fill the frame of the photograph—don't take the picture from a car window, instead get as close as you legally can by standing in the right of way. Take at least one photograph of each of individual resource. Whenever possible, only one building should appear in a photograph. In addition to photographs of each individual resource in a district, a few representative streetscape shots should also be taken to show how the resources relate to each other in terms of set back, height, vegetation, etc.

Color electronic images using digital cameras are acceptable for local historic district survey work. Digital photographs should be in JPG format at 300 dpi. If traditional 35 mm photography is used, black and white film is required as it is more archivally stable than color film. Use a fine grain film such as Plus-X, Tri-X or T-Max. Prints should be 2" x 3" or 3" x 5 " in size. The standards for survey photography are found in the *Manual for Historic and Architectural Surveys in Michigan*.

Survey Data Form

Information about the physical appearance of the resource being photographed should be recorded on a survey form. For convenience, a copy of the survey form that appears in the *Manual for Historic and Architectural Surveys in Michigan*, has been included here. You may want to photocopy the form and take the copies into the field to make notations about the architectural style or the materials used for the roof, siding, and foundation of resources in the district. The rough data gathered during the site visit is later entered into a database and linked to the photograph of the resource. Thus, digital photograph files should be named by street address and name, (Example: 123OakSt) so they can be easily linked to the data sheet record for that resource. The State of Michigan has developed a historic resource data entry program called RUSKIN that is available free to the public. RUSKIN is a Microsoft ACCESS based database.

Researching Historic Properties

PA 169 requires that the study committee research and write a history of the proposed district. The history of the district should incorporate the important trends, themes, time periods, people, and events that shaped it. The purpose of the history is to provide the legal foundation for the

significance of the district if it is ever challenged in court. Therefore the history should be concise and include relevant, documented information about the district's history. When writing the history, it should be assumed that the audience knows nothing about the community. The report should always explain **why** a person or an event was important. Researching the history of the proposed district should be done in conjunction with the photographic inventory as the research often provides leads about what to look for out in the field.

A good place to start your research is with general histories of the region or area such as county histories, historic county atlases, plat books, and commercial histories. This will provide basic information that will help to direct your more detailed research using city directories, state gazetteers, building permits, tax records, census records, photograph and postcard collections, and Sanborn insurance maps. Newspaper research can be very helpful but it can also be time consuming. Be sure you have determined the specific dates for events in order to help you narrow your search. Local history collections can be found in local, regional or university libraries. The community's local historical society may also have an archive. The Library of Michigan in Lansing has a large collection of books on individual counties and communities as well as microfilm of newspapers from around the state and microfilm of Sanborn Insurance Maps. Ask people in the community about other potential sources of information.

Mapping

Mapping is an important function of the historic resource survey. Make sure that the base maps that are used for the survey are clear and show appropriate detail. We recommend working with the planning department of your local unit of government to get the best maps possible. The purpose of the map is to enable residents of the community to visually determine if their property is located within the historic district boundaries. Therefore, the map must provide enough information and detail so that it is easy to determine if an individual property is or is not in the district. At a minimum maps must include:

- Name of the historic district
- Name of the community
- County and township Name
- Date the map was completed
- North arrow
- Street names
- Street numbers
- Lot lines

The district boundary must be boldly and clearly drawn on the map so that if it is copied, the boundary is still visible.

You may need to include more than one map depending on the size of the district. A map that shows the location of the district in relation to the overall community should be included in the report in addition to the map of the individual properties in the district. If the district is large, then detailed maps should be used and keyed to a general map. Remember, the point is for street addresses and numbers to be clearly visible on the maps. When working with an individual resource or a farmstead, estate, or church complex, a site map showing the location of resources on the site should be included.

Historic Resource Survey Report

The end product of the historic resource survey will be a survey report that will contain the following elements:

- A title page that includes, at a minimum, the name of the district, county, municipality, the name of the surveyor and the date of survey.

- A narrative history of the district that provides an overview of its development and includes important people, events, and time periods and a discussion of the architecture found in the district.
- A completed Survey Data Sheet for each resource in the district with a photograph of the resource
- Map(s) of the proposed district with the district boundary clearly drawn

The survey report is the raw data that serves as the support documentation for the historic district study committee report. **The survey report is NOT a historic district study committee report.** It is the responsibility of the historic district study committee to analyze the data in the report, summarize it, and highlight the most significant details and resources in the district for the study committee report.

MICHIGAN ABOVE-GROUND SURVEY FIELD FORM

ADDRESS

Number

Direction

Street

City/Village

Township

SURVEY INFO

Survey Date

Surveyor

NAME

Historic Name

Common Name

DATE/PROPERTY TYPE/STYLE

Date Built

Source of Date

Style

Property Type

MATERIALS

Foundation

Walls

Roof

DESCRIPTIVE NOTES

OTHER BUILDINGS/FEATURES

HISTORY

COMMENTS

PHOTO INFO

File Name

Roll No.

Photographer

Frame No.